

Expanded Scoping

**Preliminary
Draft Environmental Impact Statement**

Lake Whatcom Landscape Plan
September 13, 2002



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF
Natural Resources

September 13, 2002

DOUG SUTHERLAND
Commissioner of Public Lands

Dear Interested Party:

This Preliminary Draft Environmental Impact Statement (PDEIS) for the Lake Whatcom landscape planning area is part of an expanded scoping process to identify a preferred alternative for further analysis in a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). The final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) is scheduled for release for public comment the latter half of 2003.

In response to public concern regarding water quality and public safety in and around Lake Whatcom, the 2000 Legislature directed DNR to complete a landscape plan for state-owned trust lands in the Lake Whatcom watershed. In addition, the Legislature postponed timber harvests from DNR-managed trust land in the watershed until the plan is completed.

DNR is combining development of a landscape plan with the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process for the Lake Whatcom landscape. DNR held three public meetings in the Fall 2000 to obtain community input about issues they wanted addressed. The State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) process was formally initiated with the scoping notice released on August 31, 2001 and a public meeting held September 12, 2001.

A responsiveness summary addressing public comments was produced in December 2001. DNR and the Lake Whatcom DNR Landscape Planning Committee (the Committee) considered the public comments in preparing the five alternatives presented in this PDEIS. The alternatives reflect a broad range of management activities to meet specific objectives agreed to by DNR and the Committee.

The purpose of Alternatives 1 through 4 is to provide environmental protection on DNR-managed lands and contribute to water quality in the planning area while also preserving the economic viability of those lands for the long-term benefit of trust beneficiaries. Alternative 5 was suggested by the Committee, based on public comments received, as a comparison to the other alternatives. It is referred to as a restoration alternative, and unless viable income sources other than timber harvest can be identified and included with this alternative, it will not meet the objective for revenue.

The PDEIS is being released on September 13, 2002 and public comment will be received for 45 days. Public comments, departmental mandates and guidance from the Board of Natural Resources will be considered as DNR, with advice from the Committee, selects a preferred alternative that best meets management goals for the area.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "William J. Wallace".

William J. Wallace
DNR Northwest Region Manager
SEPA Responsible Official

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Navigating the Lake Whatcom Preliminary Draft Environmental Impact Statement

Because of the complexity and length of the Lake Whatcom Preliminary Draft Environmental Impact Statement (PDEIS), the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) developed this guide to help readers navigate through the document. The following questions and answers will also provide guidance on the best ways to offer comments to the department.

What is a PDEIS?

A Preliminary Draft Environmental Impact Statement is best described as extended scoping in the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) process. Expanded scoping gives the agency more time and opportunity to inform agencies, tribes and the public about the proposal and to gain their input.

The PDEIS identifies a number of possible alternatives to be considered, and provides preliminary analysis of each alternative, without identifying a preferred alternative.

Is DNR required to do a PDEIS as part of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process?

A PDEIS is not required as part of the EIS process. DNR decided to add this step to ensure a broad range of alternatives were given careful consideration in selecting a preferred alternative.

How does the PDEIS relate to final decision-making?

The Washington Department of Natural Resources has been working since 1993 to develop a long-range landscape management plan for approximately 15,660 acres of forested trust lands in and adjacent to the Lake Whatcom watershed.

In 2000, the Legislature directed DNR to work with an inter-jurisdictional committee to address issues of water quality and public safety in developing a landscape plan. DNR formed the Lake Whatcom DNR Landscape Planning Advisory Committee, comprised of affected agencies, jurisdictions, tribes and citizen representatives, to assist the department in developing the landscape plan.

Scoping comments were received in Fall, 2001. These comments were used by the department and the Planning Committee to draft five different management strategies that, with the exception of the fifth strategy, meet specific and agreed-upon management objectives. These five strategies are presented and analyzed as alternatives in the PDEIS. This information, and information from public comments, will be used to select a preferred alternative.

DNR expects to issue a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), with an identified preferred alternative, around June 2003. The department plans to submit the final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the Lake Whatcom Landscape Plan, which will consist of the preferred alternative identified in the FEIS, to the Board of Natural Resources around November 2003. Implementation of the Lake Whatcom Landscape Plan will follow Board approval of the Lake Whatcom Landscape Plan Proposal.

How were the alternatives developed?

DNR and the Committee drafted a set of landscape objectives and considered different management strategies to meet the objectives.

A variety of scenarios were modeled with computer software to gain more information about the potential economic outcomes from each approach. The Committee advised DNR on the development of modeling scenarios that encompassed a broad range of management options. The economic implications of each scenario to trust revenues were then compared before the formal alternatives were prepared.

The modeling results, along with the public scoping input received by DNR, were shared with the Committee, who then helped DNR draft the formal landscape plan alternatives presented in this PDEIS. DNR and the Committee developed the alternatives with the assistance of a professional facilitator contracted by DNR.

Who did the analysis? What are your scientific sources?

The alternatives were analyzed by scientists, foresters, geologists, and engineers, primarily employees of DNR (see Appendix A: Acknowledgments for complete list of names and titles). The analysts relied upon existing information, primarily the Lake Whatcom Assessment Reports (see Appendix D) and Lake Whatcom Watershed Analysis, as well as on empirical evidence gathered by a majority of the analysts. In addition, most of the analysis relied on a wealth of resources and references (see section 6.0 of the PDEIS).

What's the difference between the Lake Whatcom Assessment Reports and the PDEIS analysis?

The Assessment Reports were prepared as part of the Landscape Planning process to gather existing information regarding natural resources, cultural resources, income opportunities, and community use of the planning area. This background information was used in developing the five alternative management strategies that are analyzed in the PDEIS.

The PDEIS analysis focused on how each alternative management strategy would impact each environmental element (earth, air, water, plants, animals, etc.) identified in the SEPA process. Each analyst used information from the assessment reports, as well as other information sources, in conducting their analysis of environmental impacts.

Is a preferred alternative identified in the PDEIS?

No, the PDEIS offers five alternatives, none of which have been selected as a preferred alternative. After the 45-day comment period, the department will consider the public's comments, input from the Lake Whatcom DNR Planning Committee, any recommendations from the Board of Natural Resources, and the agency's mandates and policies to formulate a preferred alternative. This will be presented and analyzed in the subsequent Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

Which ownerships are affected by this landscape plan?

The management strategy selected as the preferred alternative for the landscape plan will be applied only to DNR managed trust lands within the planning area. These strategies will not apply to private or other public ownerships.

How is the document organized?

While the PDEIS is not a required component of the SEPA process, the document is organized to conform with SEPA requirements. Following the sections that describe the process, the purpose and the need for the PDEIS are the affected environment and alternatives sections.

The affected environment section presents the probable significant adverse impacts on the existing environment and the means of mitigation for each of the alternatives. It provides conclusions on environmental impacts and mitigating effects that relate to the alternatives.

The alternatives section is an impartial evaluation of alternative means of meeting management objectives. It contains a description of the five alternatives and describes their relative environmental impacts to allow a comparative evaluation.

The glossary and references round out the first volume of the PDEIS. The second volume contains the appendices referred to in the text of volume one.

What would DNR like from me as I review the PDEIS document?

The department welcomes readers to review all parts of the document. However, because it is lengthy and because the PDEIS is part of an expanded scoping process, DNR invites groups and individuals with specific expertise or information relevant to specific parts of the document to offer targeted comments.

What would help DNR use my comments most effectively?

The most helpful responses are those that clearly state what the respondent would like to see happen or not happen, and why. Comments that say, for instance, “I don’t like clearcuts,” do not help the agency understand the specific concerns behind the comment. DNR can be more responsive when comments are accompanied with explanations and/or specifics.

If I’m not an expert, how can I sort through and understand the scientific and technical terms?

A glossary has been compiled to help define and describe technical and scientific terms used in this document to provide assistance to the general public (see Section 5.0 of the PDEIS).

What background information is provided to help the reader understand the conclusions reached regarding potential impacts of each alternative?

In addition to the references provided in volume one, the appendices include the Lake Whatcom Assessment Reports conducted by the department as part of the plan development process, as well as the maps associated with the assessments. The appendices also include several reports that address economic analysis, transportation assumptions, etc. and letters from other agencies. Readers are encouraged to see DNR’s EISs for the Habitat Conservation Plan and the Forest Resource Plan for additional information. These documents were all used by the analysts, along

with other references, to reach their conclusions. The Lake Whatcom Watershed Analysis was also used to provide information to the analysts.

As a reviewer, am I required to choose between the alternatives presented in the PDEIS?

No. The five alternatives contained in the PDEIS offer a wide variety of management options. However, because the PDEIS is part of expanded scoping, reviewers have the option of choosing elements of different alternatives, or adding additional ideas not contained in any of the existing alternatives, when offering comments regarding a preferred alternative.

Where can I view a hardcopy of the document?

Print copies of the Lake Whatcom PDEIS are available at the Bellingham Public Library in Bellingham, the Washington State Library in Olympia, DNR's Northwest Region Office in Sedro Woolley, and DNR's headquarters in the Natural Resources Building in Olympia.

The PDEIS is also available on the Internet at DNR's homepage (<http://www.wa.gov/dnr>) Once at the homepage, select the Lake Whatcom Landscape Plan link. Copies are available for downloading at no charge from the Internet address listed above. A limited number of print copies and computer CDs will be available at no charge. Once these are distributed, additional copies will be available for the cost of printing or CD production, per RCW 42.17. Requests for hardcopies or CDs should be directed to Barbara MacGregor, DNR Communications, 1111 Washington St. SE, MS: 47003, Olympia, Washington, 98504-7003, (360) 902-1323.

How and where can I provide comments?

Reviewers can offer comments to DNR by mail or email:

- ❑ Comments can be received by the DNR SEPA Center via the agency's website at www.dnr.wa.gov or emailed to the SEPA Center at "sepacenter@wadnr.gov"
- ❑ Comments can be mailed to the SEPA Center at:
SEPA Center, Washington State Department of Natural Resources, 1111 Washington Street SE, MS: 47015, Olympia, WA 98504-7015

Oral and written comments will also be received at a public workshop to be held at the Bloedel Donovan multi-purpose room at 7:00 p.m. on October 10, 2002.

If I have questions about the process for submitting comments, whom do I contact?

For questions about how to submit comments to DNR, contact Barbara MacGregor in Communications at (360) 902-1323 or email at Barbara.MacGregor@wadnr.gov

Who is the SEPA responsible official?

The SEPA responsible official is William Wallace, Region Manager, DNR Northwest Region, Sedro-Woolley, Washington.

Preface

Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is conducting expanded scoping for the Lake Whatcom Landscape Plan. This expanded scoping will focus on this “Preliminary Draft Environmental Impact Statement” (PDEIS), which discusses possible alternatives developed by the Lake Whatcom DNR Landscape Planning Committee (the Committee) and DNR. The elements of the environment that are discussed in the PDEIS include issues identified by the public and/or DNR during formal scoping as potentially being significantly impacted. DNR, with advice from the Committee, will use public comments on the PDEIS to identify a preferred alternative, which will receive detailed analysis in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

Fact Sheet

Brief Description of Proposed Action

The Washington State Department of Natural Resources is proposing a landscape plan for approximately 15,660 acres of forested state trust lands in the Lake Whatcom Landscape Planning Area, as identified in Map A-1 and A-2, Appendix C.

Tentative Date of Implementation

The Department of Natural Resources plans to submit the final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the Lake Whatcom Landscape Plan, which will consist of the preferred alternative identified in the FEIS, to the Board of Natural Resources in roughly November 2003. (This date is subject to change as the planning process develops.) Implementation of the Lake Whatcom Landscape Plan will follow Board approval of the Lake Whatcom Landscape Plan Proposal.

Lead Agency

DNR is the lead agency for purposes of this PDEIS. The responsible official is William Wallace, Region Manager, DNR Northwest Region, Sedro-Woolley, Washington. For more information, contact William Wallace or project manager Jeff May at (360) 856-3500.

Required Licenses

No licenses are required to prepare and implement the Landscape Plan Proposal. Site-specific activities conducted under the plan may require Forest Practices Permits, Hydraulics Permits, and/or other licenses/permits.

Author and Principal Contributors

The plan alternatives were prepared by DNR and the Lake Whatcom DNR Landscape Planning Committee, with facilitation provided by Resolution Services, as contracted by the DNR. The PDEIS was prepared by Jeff May, Northwest Region (landscape plan project manager); Barbara MacGregor, Communications Group (EIS project manager); Stephen Saunders, Asset Management & Protection Division (SEPA lead); and Susan Trettevik, Olympic Region (writer). A more detailed list of participants, including scientific and technical analysts, is contained in Appendix A of the PDEIS.

Date of Issue

The Lake Whatcom Landscape Preliminary Draft Environmental Impact Statement is being released on September 13, 2002.

Comments

The period for public comments on the draft alternatives for a Landscape Plan Proposal and the preliminary draft environmental impact statement is open from September 13, 2002, to October 28, 2002. Written comments may be mailed to the SEPA Center, Washington State Department of Natural Resources, 1111 Washington Street, SE, MS: 47015, Olympia, Washington 98504-7015, or emailed to the SEPA Center at “sepacenter@wadnr.gov”.

Time and Place of Public Meetings

The Department will hold a public orientation workshop on October 10, 2002, at the Bloedel Donovan Park Multi-Purpose Room, Bellingham, Washington. The purpose of the orientation meeting is to provide citizens with information and materials that will facilitate substantive review and comment on the alternatives and analysis in the PDEIS. Public comments, both written and oral, may be provided at this meeting.

Date of Next Action

DNR expects to issue a Draft Environmental Impact Statement, with an identified preferred alternative, around June 2003. This date is subject to change.

Subsequent Environmental Review

The preliminary draft alternatives are considered “nonproject proposals” (under WAC 197-11-442). The alternatives describe potential landscape plans for state trust lands in the Lake Whatcom Landscape planning area. The Department of Natural Resources recognizes that subsequent environmental reviews of proposed site-specific actions will be necessary at a future time. The Department of Natural Resources has not identified specific future activities or times, but rather, will comply with SEPA’s phased review procedures.

Location of Forest Resource Plan, Habitat Conservation Plan, PDEIS, and Supporting Documentation

The Lake Whatcom PDEIS is available on the Internet at DNR’s homepage (<http://www.wa.gov/dnr>). Once at the homepage, select the Lake Whatcom Landscape Plan link. Print copies are also available at the Bellingham Public Library in Bellingham, and the Washington State Library in Olympia, and at DNR’s Northwest Region Headquarters in Sedro Woolley.

The Department’s 1992 Forest Resource Plan, Habitat Conservation Plan, the Engrossed Second Substitute Senate Bill 6731 (E2SSB 6731) and the PDEIS, upon which the Lake Whatcom Landscape Plan will be based, along with supporting documentation, are available for review at the Department of Natural Resources, SEPA Center, Olympia, Washington.

Cost per Copy

The Lake Whatcom PDEIS is a two-volume document. Copies are available for downloading at no charge from the Internet address listed above. A limited number of print copies and computer CD's will be available at no charge. Once these are distributed, additional copies will be available for the cost of printing or CD production, per RCW 42.17. Requests for hardcopies or CDs should be directed to Barb MacGregor, DNR Communications, Natural Resources Building, 1111 Washington St. SE, MS: 47003, Olympia, Washington, 98504-7003, (360) 902-1323.

Executive Summary

Preliminary Draft Environmental Impact Statement – Lake Whatcom Landscape Plan

The Washington State Department of Natural Resources is proposing a landscape plan for approximately 15,660 acres of forested state trust lands in the Lake Whatcom Landscape Planning Area. The Department needs to prepare a landscape plan that will guide both short-term and long-term management of state trust lands in the Lake Whatcom Landscape Planning Area, consistent with DNR's Forest Resource Plan (1992), DNR's Habitat Conservation Plan (1997), Forest Practices Rules, and the Engrossed Second Substitute Senate Bill 6731 (E2SSB 6731) [2000 Washington Laws Ch. 205] passed in the year 2000. The purpose of the landscape plan is to develop a management strategy that will provide environmental protection on DNR-managed lands and contribute to water quality in the planning area, while also preserving the economic viability of those same lands for the long-term benefit of the trust beneficiaries. The proposed action is the adoption, by the Board of Natural Resources, of this landscape plan in accordance with the policies of the 1992 Forest Resource Plan.

This Preliminary Draft EIS (PDEIS) was written by the Department to gain public input on the range and nature of alternatives to be analyzed in the Draft EIS, and on the categories of analysis planned in the draft. It is consistent with expanded scoping options allowed in the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) requirements.

The EIS process is a tool for identifying and analyzing probable adverse environmental impacts, reasonable alternatives, and possible mitigation. Through the EIS process, areas of controversy and other significant issues are identified early when the opportunities to consider a broad range of solutions are greatest. Due to the level of controversy around management of state trust lands in the Lake Whatcom Landscape Planning Area, the Department of Natural Resources identified an EIS as one way to provide adequate input and analysis for the responsible official and the Board of Natural Resources to use in making a well-reasoned judgment about potentially significant impacts associated with forest management activities.

Once the Board of Natural Resources adopts the final proposed Lake Whatcom Landscape Plan, the plan will guide the Department in managing 15,660 acres of state trust lands in the Lake Whatcom Landscape Planning Area.

DNR has been working with numerous groups to develop a landscape plan, as guided by 2000 Washington Laws Chapter 205. The Lake Whatcom DNR Landscape Planning Committee, an inter-jurisdictional committee comprised of representatives from Whatcom County, Water District 10, City of Bellingham, Washington State Departments of Health, Ecology, and Fish & Wildlife; the Lummi Tribe, and two private citizens, was formed to provide input to DNR during the planning process. The Committee was charged by the Legislature to advise DNR as the department completes a landscape plan for state lands around Lake Whatcom. The Legislature identified a number of topics to be addressed in the landscape plan, including protection for streams and unstable slopes. In addition to the Lake Whatcom DNR Landscape Planning Committee (hereafter called the Committee), DNR is consulting with other major forest landowners, the Lake Whatcom Management Committee and the Forestry Forum, watershed

residents, other organizations, the Nooksack and Lummi Tribes, and state and local elected officials.

A set of objectives was identified for this landscape, working with the Lake Whatcom DNR Landscape Planning Committee. Four sets of alternative management strategies were developed based on these objectives. A fifth alternative was developed based on comments received during public scoping. This alternative does not incorporate all of the landscape objectives identified by DNR and the Lake Whatcom DNR Landscape Planning Committee, and would require viable alternative revenue and funding sources to be carried forward into the Draft EIS. The five alternatives are:

Alternative 1 (No Action). This alternative incorporates the Department’s existing policies, legal requirements and management commitments, including but not limited to the Forest Resource Plan, Forest Practice Rules and Habitat Conservation Plan. This alternative is consistent with the Tier 3 alternative identified in DNR’s statewide sustainable harvest calculation.

Alternative 2: Legislative Requirements. This alternative adds the legislative requirements of E2SSB 6731 [2000 Washington Laws Chapter 205] to the No Action alternative. It reduces the geographic area available for active forest management.

Alternative 3: First Alternative to #2. This alternative, developed by the Committee, further reduces the geographic area available for active forest management, increases the number of trees retained after harvest and lengthens the harvest rotation age. It also increases the coordination with tribes to protect cultural resources.

Alternative 4: Second Alternative to #2. This is the second alternative developed by the Committee. It further reduces the geographic area available for active forest management and further increases the trees retained and harvest rotation age.

Alternative 5: Restoration Alternative. This alternative was developed by the Committee in response to comments received earlier during the public scoping process. This alternative pursues a restoration approach that focuses on restoring older-forest conditions, with limited, short-term silvicultural activities, and that relies on non-traditional means of securing alternative revenue to meet the trust revenue objectives.

Preliminary Findings:

Two of the highest concerns raised during scoping regarding the Lake Whatcom Landscape were water quality and safety related to earth movement (mass-wasting and debris flows). The following Executive Summary focuses on preliminary findings relative to these two issues, and a brief discussion relative to revenue production potential. The body of the PDEIS covers a much wider range of issues, and addresses earth and water in greater detail.

Earth Movement:

Road construction and timber harvest have the potential to create localized debris slides, with associated impacts, and increase the amount of water entering soils (under specific conditions), which could trigger slope failures and carry sediments. However, these potential impacts are substantially mitigated not by only DNR's policies and procedures, DNR's HCP, and the Forest Practices Rules, but also by the regulatory Watershed Analysis prescriptions completed specifically for Lake Whatcom watershed. These prescriptions are designed to prevent or avoid slope failures that would impact water quality or fish resources. Some short-term increases in sediment production will occur, regardless of mitigation.

No probable significant impacts related to slope stability or surface erosion are expected under Alternative 1. This evaluation is based in part on confidence in site assessments and design of each activity to fit the site (based on the policies and rules noted above). Alternatives 2 through 5 each reduce risk of sediment and earth movement by prohibiting some or all activities (particularly road construction and regeneration harvest) on more and more area of state trust land, rather than relying on site assessment and/or design of the activity.

It is worth noting that there is risk to downstream structures and residents on alluvial fans from debris-flow events under all the alternatives. While DNR mitigates for harvest and road-building activities, such debris-flow events are part of the natural system and would not be eliminated even if DNR ceased all operations.

Water Quality:

Timber harvesting has the potential to affect water quality in respect to sediment, temperature and nutrients. The watershed analysis, lumping all ownerships, indicates sediment yields are above background levels, shade requirements are not being met on about 25% of the stream miles, and nutrient concentrations are low. The data is not immediately amenable to separating out state trust lands, but it can be assumed that improvements are needed at some level in all three categories. As the HCP, recent changes to Forest Practices Rules, and the Watershed Analysis prescriptions begin to affect and change the forest conditions over time, all three of these should improve where needed and be maintained at desired levels. In addition, harvest can directly increase water yield, increasing peak flow events. While some marginal increase in water yield is unavoidable, watershed analysis prescriptions and harvest system planning should mitigate the potential for negative impacts.

Alternative 1 (and the other alternatives) is unlikely to adversely affect the public water supply. (See letters from the departments of Ecology and Health, Appendix D, PDEIS7 and PDEIS8.) However, the risk of sediment and phosphorus loading above natural background levels into Lake Whatcom is marginally reduced under each of the other four alternatives.

Alternative 2 through 5 add forested buffers to seasonal streams (Type 5 waters). The buffers will help to reduce the amount of sediment entering the streams during and immediately following logging by preventing soil disturbance within the riparian areas. Because the buffers for

Alternative 2 are sufficiently wide enough to provide adequate shade and filtering capacity, there will be no additional benefit to surface water quality for widths under 3 through 5.

Increases in water yield and peak flows will be slightly less under each alternative 2 and 3, with little added change under alternatives 4 and 5. The risk of significantly increasing peak flows associated with rain-on-snow events is less under Alternative 3 than under Alternative 1 or 2. For sub-basins entirely in the rain-dominated zone, the reduction in risk is minimal.

Alternatives 1 and 2 rely on chemical application controls and procedures to avoid introducing pollutants to surface waters, with no significant impacts expected. Alternative 3 reduces the risk of introducing chemicals directly into surface waters by prohibiting aerial application of chemicals (for dust abatement; pesticides; insecticides; or fertilizers). Alternative 4 and 5 prohibit any use of these chemicals, regardless of application method.

Revenue

Alternative 1 dedicates more than 50 percent of the trust lands' productive capacity for ecological and social benefits (Hulsey, 2002; see Appendix D). Alternative 2 increases this to 75 percent; Alternative 3 to about 90 percent; and Alternative 4 to about 93%. Under Alternative 5, 100 percent of the land's productive capacity is dedicated for ecological and social benefits, with any timber harvest revenue being incidental to silvicultural activities associated with habitat enhancement. For Alternative 5 to be carried forward as a viable alternative in the Draft EIS, viable alternative revenue and management funding sources will need to be identified.

Analysis of opportunities for alternative revenues from trading carbon credits (carbon sequestration), green certification, and recreational fees/leasing do not show significant potential to replace revenues from timber harvesting.

Draft Environmental Impact Statement

This Preliminary Draft EIS is being made available for a 45-day comment period. The Department plans to use the input gained from expanded scoping through this PDEIS to develop a formal Draft EIS that will be released for public review around June 2003.